

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: October 10, 2013

Agenda Item: Proposed Fishing Access Site on Upper Big Spring Creek south of Lewistown (R4)

Division: Fisheries

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Minutes

Background:

On May 10, 2012, the Fish & Wildlife Commission endorsed the department's request to pursue acquisition of two adjoining parcels of land (approximately three acres total) for the purpose of providing fishing access to Upper Big Springs Creek near Lewistown. The department has reached an agreement with the two landowners to purchase the parcels for a total of \$150,934. The department is now asking the commission to approve final acquisition of these parcels. Big Spring Creek access sites are a high priority in Region 4. The creek is too small for float fishing and too large and/or deep for extensive wading, which means that sites are needed throughout the drainage in order to provide public access to the various reaches of the creek. This particular site would provide key access to the upper section of the creek, near the Big Springs Creek Hatchery.

Public Involvement Process & Results:

The department prepared an environmental assessment on acquiring these parcels. Eight individuals and one local conservation group submitted comments. Supporters acknowledged the importance of public access sites on Big Springs Creek in order for anglers to safely fish this creek and avoid trespassing on private property. Opposition to this proposal included concern that purchase of this site would preclude purchase of other critical parcels further downstream on Big Springs Creek. There was concern that this site is unnecessary for access to the creek and could lead to conflicts with landowners.

Alternatives and Analysis:

The commission could decide not to purchase these two parcels on Upper Big Springs Creek. This alternative would address concerns that this acquisition is not a good use of funding and could lead to conflicts with nearby landowners. This would mean that anglers wouldn't have a safe place to park due to the lack of parking along the county road. Anglers would have to stay within the high water marks when fishing, which is difficult due to the depth and channel morphology of the creek.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

The department recommends that the commission approve final acquisition of these parcels, after which the department would proceed to the State Land Board for approval. Opposition to this acquisition centered on whether purchase of these two Upper Big Springs Creek parcels would preclude the purchase of a parcel on Lower Big Springs Creek that is of higher importance to those expressing this concern. The department points out that there is adequate funding to purchase these two parcels and the parcel on Lower Big Springs Creek. Through a separate action, the department will propose that the commission approve final acquisition of the Lower Big Springs Creek parcel. The department notes that Big Springs Creek is a popular fishery for anglers in central Montana, and that purchase of these parcels would enhance the quality and safety of the angling experience.

Proposed Motion:

I move that the commission authorize FWP to purchase approximately three acres of land for the purpose of providing fishing access to Upper Big Springs Creek.